

Senator Susan Collins
Senate Floor Remarks
Funding for Alzheimer's Research
August 23, 2018

What a pleasure it is to be here on the Senate floor with such determined advocates on behalf of the families all across our nation who are dealing with this devastating disease of Alzheimer's. I spoke earlier in the week about the many terrific provisions in this bill on the Defense Appropriations side and on the Labor, Health and Human Services part of the appropriations package, but I am delighted to be here today to shine a spotlight on the additional funding for Alzheimer's disease.

As a member of the Appropriations Committee, it has been such pleasure to work with my colleagues including Senator Moran, Senator Capito and our leader, Chairman Blunt, on this shared priority year after year. And I particularly want to recognize the extraordinary leadership of Chairman Blunt in making sure that adequate funding is provided for this devastating disease.

Mr. President, Alzheimer's is the sixth leading cause of death in this nation, and it is increasing at unprecedented rates. Like many families, mine too has known the pain of its devastating consequences. Today, an estimated 5.7 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's. In addition to the human suffering it causes, Alzheimer's is our most costly disease at \$277 billion a year, with Medicare and Medicaid covering \$186 billion. Without a change in the current trajectory, the number of Americans with Alzheimer's is expected to triple to as many as 14 million by 2050, costing more than \$1.1 trillion per year and bankrupting the Medicaid system.

Fortunately, Congress has taken significant actions and in this bill recognizes the urgent need to continue our investment full speed ahead.

Since the 2011 signing of the National Alzheimer's Project Act, known as NAPA, which I co-authored with former Senator Evan Bayh, we have increased funding for Alzheimer's by \$1.36 billion. Seven years ago, NIH received only \$440 million for this research, compared to more than \$5 billion for another very serious disease — cancer. Since that time, we have steadily boosted federal research dollars for Alzheimer's to \$936 million in 2016, \$1.4 billion in 2017, and \$1.8 billion last year. But this bill before us achieves a milestone because by adding another \$425 million for this research, we will bring the total funding, for the first time, to exceed the \$2 billion mark. This is the largest increase in history, and it allows us to reach the level that experts have advised us is necessary to find a means of prevention, effective treatments, or ultimately a cure by the year 2025.

This has been a bipartisan commitment. Alzheimer's doesn't care if you are a Democrat or a Republican or an Independent or a Green. It does not discriminate. This robust commitment promises returns, such as we have seen for cancer, for diabetes, and other chronic illnesses. Fueled by federal support, researchers are beginning to understand more clearly the complex biology of Alzheimer's with sophisticated new tools that are leading to better imaging agents and therapies. NIH research is laying the foundation for precision medicine, through the Accelerating Medicines Partnership for Alzheimer's disease, which will produce more targeted

therapies that I believe will lead to a means of either preventing or at least delaying the onset of this disease. With NIH funds, scientists are also exploring possible risk factors including diet, heart health, diabetes, and exposure to environmental toxins. Results from a special Blood Pressure Intervention Trial released last month, found that lowering blood pressure is significantly associated with reducing the risk of mild cognitive impairment and dementia.

Through a \$25 million NIA grant, Jackson Laboratories in Maine is co-leading the Alzheimer's disease Precision Models Center with Indiana University-- the first of its kind to accelerate the most promising research into therapies from the bench to the bedside.

This is exactly the kind of collaboration and sharing that we need to make a difference. As the Chairman of the Senate Aging Committee, and the founder and co-chair of the Senate Alzheimer's Task Force, and as the Senator representing the oldest state in the nation by median age, I am committed to making 2020 the dawn of light for Alzheimer's, to alter the path for generations to come.

The robust support in this bill represents a historic step forward that will promise dividends in the future. As the glimmers of light seep through this door that has been shut tight for far too long, we must continue to push forward. We cannot let up on the accelerator of funding now. We need to improve the lives of those living with Alzheimer's, and their caregivers. And how many of us have seen an elderly parent caring for a beloved spouse with severe dementia? It takes a toll, not just on the victim of the disease, but on the entire family and particularly the caregivers.

That is one reason I have introduced the BOLD Infrastructure for Alzheimer's Act with Senator Cortez Masto. This bipartisan bill would promote public health knowledge and awareness of Alzheimer's disease, cognitive decline, and brain health by supporting implementation of the CDC's "Healthy Brain Initiative Public Health Road Map." BOLD now has 48 cosponsors, I'm delighted to report. And we are on track to consider the bill soon in the HELP Committee, led by Senator Alexander and Senator Murray. BOLD follows our previous efforts such as NAPA, and together with the extraordinary increase in NIH funding that we are providing today, these Congressional actions are poised to usher in a whole new era in our battle against this devastating disease.

Mr. President, I have visited research laboratories all across the United States – The Mayo Clinic, NIH here in the Washington area, Jackson laboratories in the great State of Maine, the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard – and I have seen what is going on in the labs due to the increases to the NIH funding that we've provided. It is so exciting, and I am convinced that if we sustain this commitment we can avoid such tragedy for so many American families, as well as avoiding the tremendous burden of our nation's most costly disease.

Again I want to salute the efforts of Chairman Blunt for continuing to press forward and for his leadership and strong support of biomedical research.

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